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Subject: Former Agriculture Directors Warn Controversial Executive Order will Hurt Economic Growth

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For Immediate Release
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Former Agriculture Directors Warn Controversial Executive Order will Hurt Economic Growth
Leaders tell industry, labor current commission is model for good government

LANSING - Former directors of Michigan's Department of Agriculture today told a gathering of leaders from more than 60 agriculture associations, businesses, food industry representatives and labor that a controversial executive order signed last week would hamper economic progress in a rare growth area in Michigan's economy: agriculture.

"For decades, Michigan agriculture has been a model for good government, openness, accountability and economic progress, and this executive order threatens to send one of the few bright spots in our economy backwards," said Mitch Irwin, director of the Agriculture Department from 2005 to 2007.

"Michigan agriculture is creating jobs and supporting local economies across the state," Irwin said. "The Department of Agriculture touches a range of issues in Michigan that are critical to our families, from food safety and production to jobs at local grocery stores and keeping track of plant and animal diseases. Michigan agriculture works and a great deal of the credit goes to the terrific system we already have in place that emphasizes public oversight, accountability and decision-making that's done out in the open. Without a strong Agriculture Commission, important decisions are at risk of being made behind closed doors, without the hard sunlight of public scrutiny and debate, and that will only have a negative impact on agriculture as a whole."

"Michigan's bipartisan Agriculture Commission and its strong oversight authority over the Department of Agriculture is an example of a system that functions well, that protects families and jobs, and that drives the economy forward," said Dan Wyant, who served as director of the Department of Agriculture from 1996 to 2005 under both Republican and Democratic governors. Wyant is currently president of the Edward Lowe Foundation.

"By emphasizing good government, accountability and nonpartisan policymaking, the commission has been instrumental in leading Michigan's economic recovery," Wyant said. "Michigan agriculture is a bright light in our economy, growing every year and adding jobs at a time when others in the state are struggling. That's why leaders in agriculture are extremely concerned about this executive order that drastically scales back the positive aspects of the commission and prevents critical decisions from being made out in the open for the public to see. We are united in calling

on our leaders in Lansing to take action now to fix this decision and restore the full authority of the Agriculture Commission."

Last week, Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed an executive order that scales back the roles and authority of the nonpartisan Agriculture Commission. The body has provided strong public oversight since 1921 on a range of issues affecting agriculture and beyond, including selecting a director for the Agriculture Department, reviewing rules, gathering public and industry feedback, overseeing food safety and production regulations, monitoring plant and animal diseases and setting fees. The order removes key responsibilities, including selecting the director, reviewing rules and regulations, fee-setting and more.

With steady annual growth, Michigan agriculture is the second-most diverse in the nation, after California. It generates more than \$71.3 billion a year and employs more than a million Michigan citizens in a wide range of areas, from producing to processing.

Irwin and Wyant recommended that agriculture businesses, labor, food organizations and others voice their concerns about the executive order to the Michigan Legislature, call on legislators to vote against it and fix the problem.

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